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HOR321 EPH822

1428 : NUCLEAR (SCHEDULED):
(400--170 TAKES)

BY ROBERT TRAUTMAN

WASHINGTON, AUG. 23 (REUTERS)--A C.I.A.-INSPIRED STORY THAT THE SOVIET UNION IS CONSIDERING A NUCLEAR STRIKE AGAINST CHINA HAS CAUSED SERIOUS CONCERN IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT HERE.

THE STORY, WHICH HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY SOURCES BY SEVERAL DIPLOMATIC REPORTERS, IS CONTRARY TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S OWN ASSESSMENT OF MOSCOW'S THINKING ABOUT ITS DISPUTES WITH PEKING.

SOME STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS FEEL THE C.I.A.'S SPEAKING OUT ONLY SERVES TO WEAKEN THE U.S. ATTEMPT TO PLAY A NEUTRAL ROLE IN THE RUSSIA-CHINA DISPUTE.

FOR THE TIME BEING, HOWEVER, SECRETARY OF STATE WILLIAM P. ROGERS IS KEEPING HIS CRITICISM UNDER WRAPS, AND THE DEPARTMENT'S SPOKESMAN HAS BEEN BRUSHING ASIDE QUESTIONS ABOUT DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN ROGERS AND C.I.A. DIRECTOR RICHARD HELMS.

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SEVERAL DIPLOMATIC REPORTERS IN WASHINGTON EARLIER THIS WEEK QUOTED C.I.A. SOURCES--AND PRESUMABLY HELMS HIMSELF--AS SAYING MOSCOW HAS SOUNDED OUT ITS COMMUNIST ALLIES ON THEIR REACTION TO A RUSSIAN NUCLEAR STRIKE AGAINST CHINESE ATTACK INSTALLATIONS.

THEIR REPORTS ALSO SAID THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION WAS GROWING INCREASINGLY ALARMED OVER THE CHANCES OF A SINO-SOVIET WAR.

THIS REPORTED THINKING BY HELMS CONTRADICTS BOTH ON-THE-RECORD AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION PROVIDED BY TOP STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS.

ASKED LAST WEEK ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SOVIET UNION MIGHT ATTACK CHINA WITH NUCLEAR BOMBS, ROGERS SAID "I THINK THE BEST JUDGMENT IS THAT IT WILL NOT DO SO."

(MORE) (AHD) LEN/EB

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1444 : 1ST ADD WASHINGTON NUCLEAR:
X X X SO."

ROGERS ADDED THAT RUSSIA WOULD BE FACED WITH "A VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM" BECAUSE IT WOULD BECOME INVOLVED IN A LAND WAR WITH 800 MILLION CHINESE EVEN IF MOSCOW MADE A STRIKE. HE SAID THE RUSSIANS "COULD TAKE OVER A GOOD SEGMENT OF THE AREA UP TO PEKING--THEY PROBABLY COULD EVEN TAKE OVER PEKING" BUT STILL GET INTO A LAND WAR.

THEN, ON THURSDAY, OTHER STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAID THAT WHILE THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE REMAINED A SERIOUS PEACE THREAT, ALL THE REPORTS THEY HAD ABOUT A MOSCOW PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE WERE "LOW GRADE."

THEY TENDED TO MINIMIZE REPORTS OF A POSSIBLE MOSCOW ATTACK ON CHINA, SAYING THERE WAS NO DIRECT INFORMATION TO CONFIRM THEM.

REUTERS (AHD) LEN/EB